

CLAIMS

1. A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a profile identifying a given site URL,
5 an item to be queried, and a scan interval;
on a periodic basis as defined by the scan interval,
retrieving data from the given site URL; and
parsing the retrieved data according to a site
template to generate a data record comprising an item
10 name and an associated price value.

2. The method as described in Claim 1 further including the step of storing the data record.

15 3. The method as described in Claim 1 further including the step of:

comparing the associated price data to a given threshold condition; and

taking a given action if the price data has a given
20 relationship to the given threshold condition.

4. The method as described in Claim 3 wherein the given action is selected from the actions consisting

essentially of issuing an e-mail notification, logging an event, and initiating an e-commerce transaction.

5. The method as described in Claim 1 further
5 including the step of collecting associated price data
for the item name over a given period of time to produce
historical price data.

6. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein the
10 includes matching criteria that must be met for the item
name.

7. The method as described in Claim 6 wherein the
matching criteria is an exact match.

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8. The method as described in Claim 6 wherein the
matching criteria is a fuzzy match.

9. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein the
20 data record also includes secondary source information.

10. A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a set of product profiles, each
identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more
5 included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site
template;

for a given product profile, periodically retrieving
data from the given site URL according to the scan
interval;

10 parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL
according to the site template to generate a data record
for each included item comprising an item name, an
associated price value, and a secondary source; and
storing the data records.

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11. The method as described in Claim 10 wherein the
given product profile also includes a list of excluded
items.

20 12. The method as described in Claim 10 wherein the
given product profile also includes a next scan date.

13. The method as described in Claim 12 wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold expression comprising a set of one or more triggers.

5 14. The method as described in Claim 13 wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold action that is triggered if the threshold expression resolves to a given value.

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15. A computer program product having a set of instructions executable by a processor for use in a client computer for collecting product data according to the following method steps:

5 generating a set of product profiles each identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

 for a given product profile, periodically retrieving
10 data from the given site URL according to the scan interval; and

 parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item comprising at least an item name
15 and an associated price value.

16. A computer program product in a computer-useable medium, comprising:

code for generating a profile identifying a given site URL, at least one item to be queried, a scan

5 interval, and a site template;

code for retrieving data from the given site URL at the scan interval; and

code for parsing the retrieved data according to the site template to generate a data record comprising an
10 item name and an associated price value.

17. A database for use in managing a pricing agent in a computer, comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of profile records, each record identifying a URL site, a list of included items, a scan interval, and a pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site templates, each site template comprising lexical instructions for parsing a data stream to identify given data;

a price table comprising a set of pricing records, each record identifying an item name, an associated price value, and at least one source.

18. The database as described in Claim 17 further including a threshold table comprising a set of threshold records, each record identifying a threshold type, a threshold value, and a threshold comparison operator.

19. The database as described in Claim 17 wherein each profile record further includes a list of excluded items.

20. A computer, comprising:

a browser;

a database comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of
5 profile records, each record identifying a URL site,
a list of included items, a scan interval, and a
pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site
templates, each site template comprising lexical
10 instructions for parsing a data stream to identify
given data; and

a price table comprising a set of pricing
records, each record identifying an item name, an
associated price value, and at least one source; and
15 code executable in the browser during processing of
a given pricing profile record at the scan interval for
parsing data retrieved from the URL site according to the
site template to generate a data record for each included
item.

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